

THE
QUESTION,
Are the Methodists Dissenters?
Fairly Examined.

DESIGNED
TO REMOVE PREJUDICE, PREVENT BIGOTRY
AND
PROMOTE BROTHERLY LOVE.

BY SAMUEL BRADBURN.

*The common cry is still Religion's test;
The Turk's is at Constantinople best;
Idols in India; Popery at Rome;
And our own worship's only true at home:—
And true but for the time; 'tis hard to know
How long we please it shall continue so.
This side to-day, and that to-morrow burns.
So all are gods a'mighty in their turns.*

DRYDEN.

THE SECOND EDITION.

Bristol:

PRINTED AND SOLD BY LANCASTER AND EDWARDS,
REDCLIFF-STREET;
SOLD ALSO AT THE METHODIST-CHAPELS.

[PRICE THREE-PENCE.]

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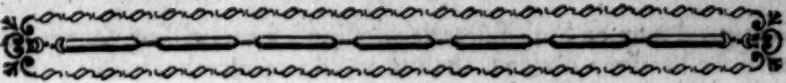
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Are the Methodists Dissenters?



HAD a question like this been agitated in *England* two hundred years ago, it would have been of great importance to those whom it concerned, as life or death might have been the consequence of the decision.

At present, blessed be the Lord, it is but of little moment, any further than the Methodists choose to make it so, by laying such stress upon it as to cause a division among themselves. Of this there is some danger; owing to a want of *candour, humility, and a better acquaintance with facts*; or, perhaps, to a *fear of the cross of Christ*.

I know that we are not without enemies, who would rejoice to see our union broken, and our honour laid in the dust. These are not wanting in their endeavours to sow discord among us: but our trust is in God, that he will still preserve us in unity with each other. This is my heart's desire and prayer to him continually; and with a single eye to this, believing it my duty, I send out this pamphlet. Should it do no good, I hope it will do no hurt. The prosperity of the Methodist-cause lies very near my heart; and though, I hope, I shall ever be a determined advocate for *universal, unrestrained liberty of conscience*, and an enemy to *every species of coercion in matters purely religious*; yet, as I owe much to the Methodists, as by their means I was brought to God, I feel myself in a special manner concerned for the welfare of the connection. It is for this reason alone, that I have resisted every temptation that has been thrown in my way to settle. For, modes of worship are, in my esteem, so trivial, and names so much more so, that I should heartily despise myself if I found my mind concerned about them, provided they be not of an idolatrous nature. I know not that I have any thing to hope, or to fear, from either churchmen or dissenters; and, as my conscience is not concerned in the question, I consider myself as quite disinterested in the result of my inquiries, and write merely for the sake of others. I thank God for this liberty, and should be glad to see all Christians, in this sense, even as I am. But, alas! this is so far from being the case, that

some good men on both sides the question, seem willing sooner to have the brethren divided, than to yield to each other in this particular. Hence we hear of some who are vehemently exclaiming against our having any thing to do with the Church, while others, equally rigid, are crying out against even allowing Dissenters to be among us, and wishing such to separate, and leave the society !!!

What can a candid, *real Methodist* do in this case? I look upon myself in this light. My principles, as tens of thousands can witness, are strictly methodistical.* And there is no dispute about them, nor about any essential truth of the gospel; nor is there any dispute about worldly wealth, or honour; the simple question is, Are we *Dissenters*, or are we *Church-people*?

In considering this point, I shall, in the first place, take a survey of the rise and first state of Methodism; I shall, secondly, shew what alterations have been made therein; thirdly, I shall sum up the reasons for, and against the question, and point out what we really are; and fourthly, propose the most likely method, in my judgment, to keep our people together.

I. What was Methodism at first?

I cannot answer this question better than it is done already by Mr. Wesley, in the *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. XII. p. 11—13.

1. Two young clergymen, not very remarkable any way, of middle age, having a tolerable measure of health, though rather weak than strong, began about fifty years ago, to call sinners to repentance. This they did for some time, in many of the Churches in and about London. But two difficulties arose; first, The Churches were so crowded, that many of the parishioners could not get in: secondly, They preached new doctrines; That we are saved by Faith, and, that *without holiness no man could see the Lord*. For one or other of these reasons, they were not long suffered to preach in the Churches. They then preached in Moorfields, in Kennington-common, and in many other places. The fruit of their preaching quickly appeared. Many sinners were changed both in heart and life. But it seemed, this could not continue long: for, every one clearly saw, these preachers would quickly wear themselves out: and no clergyman dared to assist them. But soon one and another, though not ordained, offered to assist them. God gave a signal blessing to their word. Many sinners were thoroughly convinced of sin, and many truly converted to God. Their assistants increased both in numbers and in the success of their labours. Some of them were learned, some unlearned: most of them were young: a few middle-aged: some of them were weak: some, on the contrary, of remarkably strong understanding. But it pleased God to own them all, so that more and more brands were plucked out of the burning.

2. It

* See my Sermon entitled, "Methodism set forth and defended." Preached at the opening of Portland-Chapel, *Bristol*.

2. It may be observed that these clergymen all this time, had no plan at all. They only went hither and thither, wherever they had a prospect of saving souls from death. But when more and more asked, "What must I do to be saved?" They were desired to meet all together. Twelve came the first Thursday night; forty, the next: soon after, a hundred. And they continued to increase, till three or four-and-twenty years ago, the *London Society* amounted to 2,800.

3. But how should this multitude of people be kept together? And how should it be known, Whether they walked worthy of their profession? They were providentially led, when they were thinking on another thing (namely, paying the public debt) to divide all the people into little Companies, or Classes, according to their places of abode, and appoint one person in each Class, to see all the rest weekly. By this means it was quickly discovered, if any of them lived in any known sin. If they did, they were first admonished; and when adjudged incorrigible, excluded from the society.

4. This division of the people, and exclusion of those that walked disorderly, without any respect of persons, were steps which few other communities had. To these, as the societies increased, was soon added another. The stewards of the societies in each district were desired to meet the preachers once a quarter in some central place, to give an account of the spiritual and temporal state of their several societies. The use of these quarterly meetings was soon found to be exceeding great; in consideration of which, they were gradually spread to all the societies in the kingdom.

5. In order to increase the union between the preachers (as well as that of the people) they were desired to meet all together in *London*; and some time after a select number of them. Afterwards, for more convenience, they met at *London*, *Bristol*, and *Leeds*, alternately. They spent a few days together in this general conference, in considering what might most conduce to the general good. The result was immediately signified to their brethren: and they soon found, that what St. Paul observes of the whole church, may be, in a measure, applied to every part of it, *The whole body being filly framed together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, maketh increase of the body, to the edifying of itself in love.* Eph. iv. 16.

6. That this may be the more effectually done, they have another excellent help in the constant change of preachers; it being their rule, that no preacher shall remain in the same circuit more than two years together, and few of them more than one year. Some indeed have imagined, that this was a hindrance to the work of God; but long experience, in every part of the kingdom, proves the contrary. This has always shewn, that the people profit less by any one person, than by a variety of preachers: while they

Us'd the gifts on each bestow'd,
Temper'd by the art of God.

7. Together

7. Together with these helps, which are peculiar to their own society, they have all those which are enjoyed in common by the other members of the church of *England*. Indeed they have been long pressed to separate from it, to which they have had temptations of every kind. But they cannot—they dare not—they will not separate from it, while they can remain therein with a clear conscience. It is true, if any sinful terms of communion were imposed upon them, then they would be constrained to separate; but as this is not the case at present, we rejoice to continue therein.

8. See page 48. "This is a new phenomenon! I never saw, heard, or read of any thing like it. The Methodists will not separate from the church, although continually reproached for doing it; although it would free them from abundance of inconveniences, and make their path much smoother and easier; although many of their friends earnestly advise and their enemies provoke them to it; the clergy in particular, most of whom, far from thanking them for continuing in the church, use all the means in their power, fair and unfair, to drive them out of it."

9. One circumstance more is quite peculiar to the people called Methodists; that is, the terms upon which any person may be admitted into their society.—*They do not impose, in order to their admission, any opinions whatever. Let them hold particular or general redemption, absolute or conditional decrees; let them be churchmen or dissenters, presbyterians or independents, it is no obstacle. Let them choose one mode of worship or another, it is no bar to their admission. The presbyterian may be a presbyterian still; the independent, or anabaptist, use his own mode of worship; so may the quaker; and none will contend with him about it.—They think and let think. One condition, and one only is required—A REAL DESIRE TO SAVE THE SOUL.—Where this is, it is enough; they desire no more; they lay stress upon nothing else. They ask only, Is thine heart herein as my heart? if it be, give me thy hand."*

II. Such was the original state of Methodism. Let us now consider what alterations have been made therein.

1. It is certain there is no alteration in the doctrines of the Methodists: these are exactly the same they were at first. It is true, there were a few expressions, which Mr. Wesley and his brother used in the beginning, which they thought proper to alter, as they supposed them not so clear and defensible as they might have been. But there is not the least change in any point which they ever considered of any moment. Some indeed have insinuated that we had changed our opinions; but it is not true. We believe as firmly as ever, the total depravity of human nature by the fall of Adam, and the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ. We believe and enforce as strongly as ever, the necessity of repentance, justification by faith, the new birth, and entire sanctification.

2. The

2. The practice of the Methodists is as uniform as ever. I have heard the contrary affirmed; but it was by those who neither knew nor loved us. I do not know that there is a man in England that is better acquainted with our people than I am; and I declare, that the Methodists are so far from being a *fallen* or a *falling* people, that, as far as I can judge, there never was a time when there was more real religion among us than there is now. Tens of thousands in our society are truly alive to God, and are an ornament to their profession; and if a few are found otherwise, it is not to be wondered at: it is rather a wonder there are not more. Glory be to God for the grace that keeps us!

3. If there be any alteration in the discipline, I know nothing of it: it stands unaltered in our rules. And instead of the preachers relaxing in the enforcement of it, they are, if possible, more strict than ever. Improper persons are excluded as rigorously as at first, without regarding whether they be poor or rich. I call upon any that think otherwise, to point out the persons in any place who walk disorderly, and see if we do not put them away immediately. Those who will not do this, and yet blame us, are unreasonable, uncharitable people.

4. The only thing remaining, in which any alteration could take place, is what may be called our Church Government. This in one sense might be included in discipline; but I made a distinction, because I wished to reduce the subject to as narrow a compass as possible. By church government, I mean the office of the ministers, leaders, stewards, and trustees, the manner of conducting public worship, and all rites or ceremonies.

1. The leaders are appointed in the same manner, and their office is exactly the same as it has been these forty years. They are the proper representatives of the people. They watch over the souls committed to their care; and (to compare small things with great) they are, in every place, to the preacher, what the parliament is to the king, only no one can be a proper leader in our connection, unless he be appointed by the preacher; but the preachers always take the sense of the leaders in appointing one, and only appoint such as are generally approved of.

2. The office of the stewards is the very same as at the beginning. They receive the money from the leaders, defray the expences, and keep the accounts. I know of no difference in this office from what it was at first. If there be any thing neglected in what concerns a steward, it is the permitting, contrary to an express rule, a steward to be in office above two years together. However holy or useful a man may be, the breach of this rule is a real evil in our connection. It puts an improper degree of power into the hands of a few men (in some places of one man) and excludes others from the office, who are thereby kept ignorant of the affairs of the society, and consequently not so much concerned for its welfare. If the being a steward be a *privilege*, why should not every proper

proper person enjoy the honour of it in his turn? If it be only a *cross*, why should not every one take it up?

3. With respect to trustees, their office is not so much a Methodist-rule, as a *legal* concern. Their *trust-deed* being enrolled in Chancery, specifies their *duty* and their *power*. With these therefore we have nothing to do, only as friends, but according to the deed of the house which they have in trust.

4. Thus far there is no deviation from our first plan. Every thing is just as it was half a century ago. And although there has been a great stir in some places, about the change in the time and manner of public worship, and the ordination of some of the preachers, there is no ground for any one to be uneasy; as there is nothing done but what was for the people's good, and what seemed necessary in the order of Providence. This will best appear, by reviewing the whole affair from the beginning. And as the ordination of the preachers, and the alteration of the time and manner of public worship are, in several respects, connected together, we may consider them under the same head.

Before I proceed, I think it right to observe, that as Mr. Wesley must be brought forward, as being chiefly concerned in every alteration that has been made, (for his power was nearly unlimited) nothing that will be said is intended as the smallest reflection upon his character. My thoughts of this truly great man are published to the world; and many of my friends, both preachers and people, tell me they think it the best character of him that has yet seen the light. I verily believe he always did the best he could according to the light he had. I have not a doubt of the sincerity of his professions respecting the Church. I am sure he loved the service in the church manner. But it is certain he was often perplexed concerning the degree of conformity which he ought to observe with regard to the Governors, and Government of the Church. The following extract from a letter of his to his Brother Mr. Charles Wesley, will shew his mind herein in the clearest light.

“ *Plymouth-Dock, Aug. 19. 1785.*

“ For these *forty years* I have been in doubt concerning that question, What obedience is due to Heathenish Priests and Mitred Infidels?

I have from time to time proposed my doubts to the most pious and sensible Clergymen I knew. But they gave me no satisfaction: rather they seemed to be puzzled as well as me. Some obedience I always paid to the Bishops, in obedience to the laws of the land. But I cannot see, that I am under any obligation to obey them farther than those laws require.

It is in obedience to those laws, that I have never exercised in *England*, the power which I believe God has given me.

I firmly believe I am a scriptural *Επισκοπος* * as much as any man in *England* or in *Europe*. (For the *Uninterrupted Succession*

* *Bishop.*

cession I know to be a fable, which no man ever did or can prove.) But this does in no wise interfere with my remaining in the Church of England: from which I have no more desire to separate than I had fifty years ago. When Mr. Smyth prest us to "separate from the Church," he meant, "Go to Church no more." And this was what I meant seven-and-twenty years ago, when I persuaded our brethren "Not to separate from the Church."—What then are you frightened at? I no more separate from it now than I did in the year 1758. I submit still, (though sometimes with a doubting conscience) to Mitred Infidels." See the whole of the letter, Armin. Mag. Vol. ix. page 50.

The occasion of Mr. Wesley's writing this letter to his Brother, was to vindicate his conduct in ordaining Ministers, which appeared to Mr. Charles as a total renunciation of the Church, and a grievous sin. For, though he hardly ever went to Church, and was no more under the jurisdiction of a Bishop than I am, yet he was so attached to the Name of a Church-man, that I heard him say, he should be afraid to meet his father's Spirit in Paradise, if he left the Church! Mr. John Wesley, on the other hand, as we have seen, remained therein with a *doubting conscience*. If we keep this in view, we may easily excuse Mr. Wesley in every step he took; and instead of blaming him, or wondering at what he has done, we shall rather be forced to admire his conduct, as happily concentrating in himself the widest extremes of strong attachment to the Church on one hand, supported by prudence and honour; and a willingness to give up any thing that belonged to it, on the other, when he saw a more excellent way, though it should be attended with the reproach of being unsteady.

But wherein did Mr. Wesley make any alterations? I answer, He changed the Time of service in the Foundry from being early in the morning only, on Sundays as well as other days, to Church-Hours on Sunday in the forenoon. And notwithstanding the insignificance of this change it was the real source of every alteration that followed. For, as Mr. Wesley could not always be in London, and at that time his Brother also travelled, he hired Clergymen to supply his place when absent, and to assist him when his Brother was absent. They had the full, regular service of the Church, and the Lord's Supper every Sunday; and being performed by episcopally ordained Ministers, the generality of the people did not consider it as dissenting from the Church though they had no more to do with the Church, as to real connection or subordination than with the Jews. This practice has continued in London ever since.

Had the Clergymen that Mr. Wesley employed been men of abilities, it is probable, this deviation from the first plan would not have operated as it did, at least not so powerfully. But this was far from being the case. Some of them were far inferior to many of the local Preachers. Hence the Parsons were employed to read the prayers and administer the Lord's Supper, and frequently one of

the Preachers preached, and after a time, read the prayers also, and that in four or five Preaching-Houses in London.

The reader will naturally conclude that these changes did not take place without some discontent. Some of the discerning people saw where this tended, and wished to oppose it, but could not. The Preachers, considering preaching the Gospel as the chief work of a Minister of Christ, were willing to put up with this heterogeneous mixture, for the sake of doing good. And those who loved the Preachers, were careless about any thing else, if they could but hear the preaching which was so much blest to their souls; and all submitted, however reluctantly, to Mr. Wesley.

In time, I know not exactly when, nor is it worth while to look, the same method was adopted in Bristol, where Mr. Charles Wesley had settled, only with this difference, none of the Preachers, I believe ever officiated there in church hours.

Some of the people in the country considered this plan as a great indulgence to those cities, and wished to enjoy the same privilege; while others looked upon it as a criminal departure from original Methodism. In the city of Norwich greater liberty still was allowed: Preachers were authorized to baptize and administer the Lord's Supper; but this did not long continue, Mr. Charles Wesley was so much against it. And very few places, except London and Bristol, had the service in church hours, till the year 1782. At that time there was a manifest relaxation in some things relating to the Church, upon which great stress had been laid. See *Armin. Mag.* Vol. v. p. 152.

In the year 1776, the Rev. Dr. Coke left the Church, and joined our connection. He is the only Clergyman that ever was in the connection as a proper travelling Preacher. All the others have been chiefly confined to London, as Mr. Wesley's Curates, and many of the Preachers considered them as perfectly distinct from the body, as they did other dissenting Ministers.

I should not have mentioned any thing about the Clergymen (for I wish not to offend them) but my subject required it. For, their coming out of the Church pained the minds of many of the Preachers. I, for one, always reasoned thus: We profess to be Church people, and to love the Church; and yet take the converted Ministers out of it. The Church stands greatly in need of them; our connection does not. They may do good in the Church, and we cannot get admittance there: but what good did they ever do among us? If it be not sinful to stay in the Church, is it not a sin to leave it? Is it not going out of the order of God? I am as much a Church Minister in the eye of the law, and in common sense, as any Clergyman that voluntarily throws off the jurisdiction of the Bishops, and preaches constantly in dissenting Meeting-houses. If Clergymen were persecuted for the truth, and driven out of the Church, as Mr. Wesley and his brother were, we are ready to receive them with open arms; but when they leave the Church of
their

their own accord, influenced by any other motive than believing it sinful to stay, they are much more Dissenters than any of the Methodist Preachers; and whether designedly so, or not, they are in reality, sapping the very foundation of the Church. I often mentioned this to both Preachers and People, and many times, as many can witness, told Mr. Wesley all my heart upon this subject; and I believe, what I said contributed in some measure to prevent a scheme from taking place, which would have disgraced the whole body of Preachers had they submitted to it. There was a design formed to place a Clergyman in each of our large Places, to officiate as they do in London, and the Preachers were to go on as usual. Who formed this design first, I will not say; but it roused the honest indignation of all the Preachers that I ever conversed with concerning it. An attempt of this kind was actually made at Manchester; but the three Preachers trampled it as mire under their feet.—In short, the scheme failed. At Leeds, in the year 1784, some time during the Conference, Mr. Wesley held a consultation with several Clergymen, concerning the ordination of Preachers for America. The plan either did not meet with their approbation, or they were not willing to countenance it outwardly; so the meeting was abruptly broken up by Mr. Wesley's going out.

Mr. Whatcoat and Mr. Vasey having offered themselves for America, met Mr. Wesley, Dr. Coke, and Mr. Creighton, in Bristol. Mr. Wesley consecrated Dr. Coke to be a Superintendent, or, as the Doctor called it, a *Bishop*; and Mr. Whatcoat and Mr. Vasey were first ordained Deacons, and then Elders, Dr. Coke and Mr. Creighton assisting Mr. Wesley on the occasion. They then bought Gowns and Bands, like the Clergy of the Church, and the Doctor, with the two Elders, went to America, to consecrate Mr. Asbury, and ordain Deacons and Elders.

In the Minutes of the Conference 1785, Mr. Wesley published his reasons for taking these steps. The following clause will shew his mind on the subject: "Lord King's Account of the Primitive Church convinced me many years ago, That Bishops and Presbyters are the same Order, and consequently have the same right to ordain. For many years I have been importuned from time to time, to exercise this right, by ordaining part of our travelling Preachers. But I have still refused, not only for Peace-sake; but because I was determined as little as possible to violate the established Order of the national Church to which I belonged." See the whole account, *Armin. Mag.* Vol. viii. p. 600.

Mr. Wesley abridged the "Book of Common Prayer," first for the Americans; and afterwards, with some variations, published it for the Methodists at large. I found this in use at Snowfields and Wapping Preaching-Houses, when I was appointed for London in the year 1786. I used it a few times till Mr. Wesley came to Town. I then said many things against continuing to do so, and he gave me leave to do as I pleased; I accordingly laid it

aside. My reason for this, was not that I believed it wrong to use it, or that any thing in it was injured by Mr. Wesley; but because he and his curates continued to use the old one. I saw no propriety in this conduct, and therefore bore my testimony against it. But many people who called themselves strict church-folks, had other reasons for not using it. When they saw that all the Saints' Days, the Athanasian and Nicene Creeds, several of the Articles of Religion, and many of the Psalms, were left out, they rejected it with disdain, and it is not used yet but in a very few Towns in England.

At the conference in 1785, Mr. Wesley, Dr. Coke, and Mr. Creighton ordained Mr. Pawson, Mr. Hanby, and Mr. J. Taylor, in the same manner they had done Messrs. Whatcoat and Vasey. At the conference 1786, six or seven were ordained, some of whom went to the West Indies, and some to Scotland. Some of these Ministers have ordained others, sometimes in conjunction with Mr. Wesley, or Dr. Coke, and sometimes without either of them, which Mr. Wesley approved of, and considered their authority equal with his own in this particular, Bishops and Elders, in his account; being the same order.

At the conference 1788, Mr. Wesley consecrated Mr. Mather a Bishop, in the manner he had done Dr. Coke; and not long before his death, he ordained Mr. Henry Moore and Mr. Rankin. And I am certain he never repented of the steps he had taken. He believed what he had done was agreeable to the will of God; he went into Eternity with that persuasion; and who can prove that he was mistaken? But he did not consider all this as making *him* a Dissenter. His thoughts on this head are published over and over: the substance of which you have in the Magazine for 1789, p. 45. which for the sake of those who have not the Magazines, I shall here transcribe.

"The question properly refers (when I speak of a separation from the Church) to a *total* and *immediate* separation, such was that of Mr. *Ingham's* people first, and afterwards that of Lady *Huntingdon's*, who all agreed to form themselves into a separate body *without delay*: to go to Church no more, and to have no more connection with the Church of *England*, than with the Church of *Rome*.

Such a separation I have always declared against, and certainly it will not take place (if ever it does) while I live. But a kind of separation has already taken place, and will inevitably spread, though by slow degrees. Those Ministers, so called, who neither live nor preach the Gospel, I dare not say, are sent of God. Where one of these is settled, many of the Methodists dare not attend his ministry; so if there be no other Church in that neighbourhood, they go to Church no more. This is the case in a few places already, and it will be the case in more, and no one can justly blame *me* for this, neither is it contrary to any of my professions."

These

These are the principal alterations which Mr. Wesley (in conjunction with Dr. Coke and other Ministers who had been in the Church) made in the Methodist-plan :—The time of divine service from being early in the morning to church hours :—The mixing Clergymen (as they were still called) and Laymen in the public worship :—The ordaining Deacons, Elders, and Bishops :—The abridging the Prayer-Book and appointing it to be used by the Methodists.

III. I shall now sum up the reasons for, and against the Methodists being church-people, and shew what we really are.

First, What reasons are generally produced to prove that the Methodists are church-people?

1. The advocates for our being church-people say, they have no objection to the hierarchical constitution of the church. They are willing to allow the King to be the *supreme head of the Church on earth*. They do not disapprove of Archbishops, Bishops, Deans, Archdeacons, Rural Deans, Prebendaries, Canons, Rectors, Vicars, Curates, &c. &c. And as this hierarchy is one material cause of non-conformity, they think, they cannot with propriety be called Dissenters while they approve of it.

2. They say, they believe all the Doctrines of the Church : They approve of the Book of Common Prayer, the Creeds, Articles, and Homilies of the Church. So that as to what they believe, they will not allow that there is the least pretence for calling them Dissenters.

3. They declare, that they have no scruple respecting the form or manner of conducting the service of the church, The having different parts of the service in different parts of the Church ; bowing or courtesying at the name of Jesus ; signing with the cross in baptism ; the dress of the ministers, and the habits of their several orders ; and every thing else in the rites and ceremonies of the church they allow to be right ; and therefore they contend that they are church-people.

4. They affirm, that they approve of the discipline of the church, meaning thereby the whole of the ecclesiastical law, as far as it is known. I put in *as far as it is known*, because it is exceedingly embarrassed, by being mixed with the laws of the land. This will appear from the following extract from Burn : "The ecclesiastical law of England is compounded of these four main ingredients ; the civil law, the canon law, the common law, and the statute law.—Where these laws do interfere and cross each other, the order of preference is this : The civil law submitteth to the canon law ; both of these to the common law ; and all the three to the statute law. So that from any one or more of these, without all of them together, or from all of these together, without attending to their comparative obligation, it is not possible to exhibit any distinct prospect of the English ecclesiastical constitution." But if the church laws are approved of as far as they are known, those who approve of them are so far not Dissenters.

5. They

5. They strongly urge their *practice* as a proof of their being church-people. They go to church to hear sermons, to join in the prayers, to have their children baptized, to receive the Lord's Supper, &c. &c. And they look upon those as either ignorant or wicked who call them Dissenters.

I believe these are the strongest reasons that can be produced, in favour of those who say they are church-people. Let us secondly, observe what is generally urged by those that say the Methodists are Dissenters.

1. All the places of worship belonging to the Methodists are licensed agreeable to the toleration act. And whatever we call them, they are in fact, as much *dissenting meeting-houses* as any in the kingdom. The law knows nothing of them unless they be either episcopal churches or chapels, or dissenting meeting-houses. And how can people constantly worship God in such places, and not be dissenters? By the 1 W. c. xviii. s. 16. it appears, that, "If a man be a professed church-man, and his conscience will permit him sometimes to go to meetings instead of coming to church, the act of toleration shall not excuse him; for it was not made for such people." When some of our people, not long since, applied to a Bishop for a license, they were told, "You must not only profess yourselves dissenters: you must declare that you scruple to attend the service or sacraments of the church, or we can grant you no relief: for the act in question was made only for those who have these scruples." See a full account of this, in the Life of Mr. Wesley, by the Rev. Dr. Coke, and the Rev. Henry Moore, pages 497, 498.

2. The Preachers are either licensed as dissenting ministers, or they are not licensed at all. If they be not licensed, they fly in the face of the law, and are (by the 22 C. 2. c. 1. s. 3.) liable to a fine of 20l. for the first offence: and for every other offence 40l. If they be licensed, it must be as dissenting Teachers, and there is no distinction in law, as to different degrees of dissent. Surely then, if both Places and Ministers be such, they must be dissenters who attend them.

3. The first Founders of the connection have formed regular plans, and made rules of an ecclesiastical nature perfectly distinct from the law of the church. By these rules the people have been, and are governed. The preachers have been regularly appointed every year to the charge of many hundreds of congregations, without being under any control from the Bishops, and without being any way accountable to them as the heads of the church. The law on this article is very strict: "Whoever shall affirm, that it is lawful for any sort of ministers and lay-persons, or either of them, to join together and make rules, orders, or constitutions, in causes ecclesiastical, without the King's authority, and shall submit themselves to be ruled and governed by them; let them be excommunicated *ipso facto*, and not restored until they repent, and publicly revoke

revoke those their wicked and anabaptistical errors." The act of toleration affords no relief from this law, but to avowed dissenters. What then are they who talk of being church-people, and trample upon the laws of the church?

4. The service is in many of the preaching-houses in church-hours, so that the people cannot go to church without neglecting their own places of worship. This is particularly the case in London, in the City-road, West-street, Snowsfields, Wapping, Lambeth-marsh, and Spitalfields; in Deptford, Plymouth-Dock, Portland-Chapel, Bristol, Bath, Kingswood, Birmingham in Cole-shill-Street and Deritend; in Dudley, Tunstall, Sheffield, Nottingham, Huntley, Manchester, Chester, Warrington, Liverpool, Delph, Greetland, Bradshaw, and many other places. In some of these places the service is performed exactly in the dissenters' manner, having no form of prayer, except the Lord's prayer. In others, the abridgment of the book of common prayer is used; in which, besides many alterations in the service, there is a form for ordaining ministers, quite different in many respects from the form of the established church, the one being episcopal, the other perfectly presbyterian, agreeable to this form many of the preachers have been ordained.

Where the service is not avowedly in church-hours, it might as well be so; for the preachers in general are travelling from place to place during divine service, to supply the different congregations under their own care. And as most of our people love to hear their own preachers in preference to any others, thousands of them make it a constant practice to go from one place to another, with, or after their preachers, and never go to church for years together. This is particularly the case in Yorkshire, and in most places where the preaching is at one, or two o'clock. Surely these will allow that they are dissenters.

5. It is not uncommon to hear some Methodists talk against going to church, and assign as a reason for so doing, that the service is tedious and dead, and that the minister is ignorant, wicked, and idle. Many of these never go to church, no not to the Lord's Supper, but totally neglect that most sacred ordinance!!!

These, as far as I recollect, are the chief reasons in favor of those who say the Methodists are dissenters. And from this view of the subject on both sides, may it not still be asked, what are the Methodists?

If a stranger to us should look into an English Dictionary for information, he reads opposite to the word Methodist,—A new kind of Puritans lately arisen; or, a new Sect; or something equally indeterminate. Should he inquire of the Bishops and episcopal Clergy, he would generally be told, They are Enthusiasts, Heretics, or a kind of Dissenters. Should a Lawyer be asked, the answer would be much the same. What then are we? for we are not content with these definitions. The question has nothing to do with *doctrines*; therefore

therefore bringing them in as any kind of proof, is nothing: I believe the doctrines of the church; so do millions of dissenters. Nor will it do for a consequential talker about the *old plan* to urge, that he is a churchman, because he sometimes goes to church to receive the sacrament; for so do numbers of known, avowed dissenters. Neither does the question relate to some individuals among us, who, when well, never miss going to church. But the question is, What is the *Methodist-Constitution*? And I shall give the answer in Mr. Wesley's own words; which though I am not sure that they are printed, yet I am willing to go into Eternity declaring that he said them to me, and I know not that he has not said them to hundreds: his words were, "As soon as I am dead, the Methodists will be a regular Presbyterian Church." And he did not mean that we should become such by making any alterations in our Government, but he meant, that *his death would make us such*. While he lived, he was the head, the Bishop: but as soon as he died, all his power died with him: He left no successor, he could leave none. Our constitution therefore immediately and necessarily differed from what it was the moment before, just as the Dutch Government does from the English.

People, in general, do not distinguish betwixt the Methodists with Mr. Wesley at their head; and the Methodists without him. The Preachers know the distinction well; and the circular letter that was sent out, dated at Halifax, the very month in which he died, proves that they understood their constitution thoroughly. Our *Quarterly Meetings* answer to those church-meetings in Scotland called the *Presbytery*; our *District Meetings* agree exactly with the *Synod*; and the *Conference* with the *General Assembly*. We are not *Episcopalians*, we cannot be. We are not *Independents*, we will not be; because it would destroy the Itinerant Plan, which is, in one sense, the very life of Methodism, and which we are determined to perpetuate. Therefore we must, as to our *constitution*, be *Presbyterians*, whatever we may choose to call ourselves.

If it be true, (as has been mentioned before, in Mr. Wesley's apology for ordaining) that "Bishops and Presbyters are the same Order," then we may as well be called Episcopalians as Presbyterians. And agreeable to this notion, Dr. Coke calls our connection in America, "The Methodist-Episcopal-Church." But I doubt this will not satisfy those who wish to be thought proper members of the Church of England!

Perhaps it will be less exceptionable, and take in the whole truth, if I say, The Methodists that were in connection with the late Rev. John Wesley, are in general, in their judgment and affections, on the side of the established church; in their constitution or church-government they are mild presbyterians, admitting among them pious people of any persuasion; and in their practice, some of them go regularly to church in (what are called) canonical hours; others occasionally conform, as many other dissenters do, in receiving the Lord's Supper; and many thousands of them are simply hearers of their own preachers, and seldom go any where else.

IV. Thus

IV. Thus having viewed the rise and original plan of Methodism; having traced out the principal changes that have taken place, and summed up what is generally advanced for and against our being church-people; and having shewn what we really are; I proceed to point out the most likely plan to keep us united.

1. It has been suggested, That as the Methodists in general are not *conscientious dissenters*, but real well wishers to the church, some method might be adopted to unite them more closely to it. For instance, if the King and the Bishops were willing, a given number of the Preachers (suppose all who have travelled seven years with a fair character) might be ordained, and all our chapels might be made tributary to the Bishops; and that without the least injury to either the Church or the Methodist-Plan. For the conditions of ordination might be such, as would preclude the Preachers from intruding upon the State Clergy; and the terms upon which the chapels should become tributary, might be such as would preserve them from ever being put to any other use than was originally intended. I shall take the liberty to mention a few particulars, which will illustrate my meaning.

1. Let no Preacher be ordained but those recommended by the Conference, and let that recommendation be deemed sufficient.

2. Let no Preacher, ordained on this plan, be permitted to officiate in any of the Churches, without a special license from a Bishop for that purpose: and if any preacher be so licensed, let him be put out of the Methodist-connection: and let no regular Clergyman officiate in any of our chapels.

3. Let none of the Preachers perform the rite of marriage in England or Ireland; but let those who are ordained bury the dead, baptize, and administer the Lord's Supper, provided they never receive any money for doing any thing of this kind; but that all the dues be regularly paid to the parochial Ministers.

4. Let the service of the Church as by law established, be regularly used in all our chapels where service is in church-hours, the ordained Preachers only to wear the dress of the Clergy, and administer the Ordinances.

5. Let the Methodist-plan remain entire, as it respects Itinerancy, Circuits, Districts, Conferences, and every kind of Meeting, and the whole of our Discipline as at present.

6. Let the Preachers be so far subject to the Episcopal Jurisdiction, that any of the Bishops may be present at our Conferences, while the Probationers—and the Preachers' characters are examined; and let any such Bishop propose any question, relating to our doctrine or discipline, that he may wish to have cleared up; and if he have any charge against a Preacher, let him bring it forward when that Preacher's character is examining, the same as any Preacher does. And let every Preacher that is excluded from the connection, be also legally debarred from exercising his office as an ordained Minister,

7. Let all the chapels in the connection be registered in the Bishops' books; and let each chapel pay to the Bishop of the diocese in which it stands, five shillings a year for every hundred pounds which it cost, as a compensation for his trouble.

Such are the rough outlines of a scheme, that if adopted, might bring half a million of people into the strictest union with the Church. And if something of this kind be not done, will not those be to blame who oppose it?—I am not one of those.

II. Some who have supposed there was no possibility of the above plan taking place, have proposed our petitioning Parliament for a repeal of those penal laws which are so oppressive to us; particularly the Conventicle Act; that we might have liberty to worship God in peace, without being obliged to equivocate in order to get a license. But what hope have we of this? If the Bishops would not come into the above-mentioned plan, (which would do them more honour, besides increasing their revenue, than sanctioning an Act of Parliament) surely they will oppose any thing of the sort. What then shall a people do, who greatly love the Church, and yet cannot in conscience leave the Methodists? To be consistent as far as they can, is certainly their duty. If then we must and will be called church-people, (to which I have not the smallest objection) and if we be determined, as a body, to convince the world that we are sincerely attached to the Church, and will prevent a dissent from it as much as we can, let us immediately

1. Reduce our places of worship to the original simplicity which was observed for many years, in building, naming, and laying them out. There were no altar-pieces—no pews; but plain seats without backs to them. Such were those in Dublin, Cork, and Bristol, when I was in those cities. Mr. Wesley would not even call them Preaching-houses; but called that at Newcastle upon Tyne, The Orphan-House, that at Bristol, &c. The New Room, or simply, The Room. Compare these with the chapels, as they are now called, in the City-Road, in Bath, in Oldham-street, Manchester, &c.!! Why were communion-tables and painted altar-pieces prepared? Why is every thing in, and about the Preaching-houses made to resemble Churches, and called Chapels? Was it that a separation might (to use Mr. Wesley's words) "*inevitably spread*?" Or was it to deceive people—to make them think that they were Church-chapels? Alter these things without delay; and keep to the *Old Plan*.

2. Let all the preachers dress like other people, not like Ministers. This was once seriously intended; I know not how it was prevented. Baal's priests put on black coats to hide the dirt occasioned by the smoke of their sacrifices; and some ministers of the gospel have adopted their custom, perhaps, for its grave appearance. We conform to it on the same ground that we use the term *Reverend*; not because we are fond of flattering titles, or particular habits; but because the State Clergy might otherwise suppose, that we acknowledged

ledged them the only ministers of Christ. Now, if we be not Ministers, let us lay aside the name and the dress immediately. I have not the least objection to begin, and try whether we cannot do as much good in Brown, Green, or White, as in Black or Blue.

3. Let every place of worship in the connection be shut in canonical hours. Let no Preachings, Prayers, Lovefeasts, Class-meetings, nor any kind of service be suffered on any account, in either Chapel or House belonging to the Methodists, between the hours of ten and twelve in the forenoon, and two and four in the afternoon. The old methodist-hours for preaching on Sundays were seven in the morning, five in the evening, and in country places, in the middle of the day, so as to be done before Church time. Adopt these times of worship directly, or blush to name the *Old Plan*! Will you object that, "there is a heavy debt on the Chapels, the interest of which cannot be paid but by having service in Church-hours?" Would you then trample under foot the *Old Plan* for filthy lucre? You that are fond of quoting scraps of Mr. Wesley's writings, making him speak what he never meant, what think ye would he say to such a reason as this, for making yourselves ridiculous in the esteem of both Churchmen and Dissenters?

Perhaps you will say, "It is not the Chapels nor the Preachers, nor the times of Service that make us Dissenters; but the having the Ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper administered among us, this alone can constitute us proper Dissenters." I have heard this positively asserted, over and over, by men whom I greatly respect; and I have sometimes said but little to them, because I saw they could not bear it; but I ought, in arguing on a point like this, to know no man after the flesh; I therefore now assert, that this is an absolute falshood! And I hereby call upon any man in, or out of the society, to prove from the Civil, Canon, Common, or Statute Laws, of this Empire, that either the administration of Baptism, or the Lord's Supper, or both of them together, is the exclusive test of a People's being Dissenters. If any person will prove this, I promise ingenuously to own myself mistaken: Till then, I hold all who read this pamphlet such as I hope I shall never be, if they attempt to urge this any more. "But is not receiving the Sacrament the only religious qualification required by the Corporation and Test Acts, of a man's belonging to the Church of England?" It is; and therefore those laws are of no service to the nation, so far as they cannot preclude a bad man from any office, Civil or Military. Nor are they at all in point; for, they do not say that you must receive the Sacrament no where else; you may receive it every day, where, and how you please, and be, in this sense, as good a Churchman *in Law*, as any in the Empire, provided, you receive it sometimes at Church. The words of the law are, "By the 25 C. 2. c. 2. Every person who shall be admitted into any office civil or military, or shall re-

ceive any pay by reason of any patent or grant from the King, or shall have any command or place of trust in England or in the Navy, or shall have any service or employment in the king's household, shall within three months after his admission, receive the Sacrament according to the use of the church of England, in some public church on the Lord's day, immediately after divine service and sermon." This Law therefore excludes none from any of these offices, but those who scruple to receive the Lord's Supper in the church of England form. Hence there are many Dissenters in very important trusts, by occasionally conforming to the usage of the Church in this particular, who nevertheless receive the Sacrament in their own way, as often as is customary in the congregations to which they belong. In short, a man must be a stranger to the laws of England, not to know, that the whole stress of those clauses, or acts, which describe Dissenters, is laid upon *Public Worship alone*; such as joining in prayer, or hearing a sermon, in other places than the Episcopal churches. Shut up then your places of worship in church hours, and go to church agreeable to the *Old Plan*; or cease to call yourselves church people, lest both churchmen and dissenters should call you methodistical deceivers, and prove you such!!! There must be no excuse.

4. Let any of the Episcopal Ministers, who think it a sin to be any longer under the jurisdiction of the Bishops, or, who may be persecuted and driven out of the church, or who from any conscientious motive may come among us, be appointed to circuits in common with the other preachers, dress as they do, and never administer the Ordinances on any pretence whatever. If any distinction be allowed but what arises from age and merit, you do nothing to the purpose upon this plan. Every Clergyman that renounces the Jurisdiction of the Bishops, as all do who are employed regularly in our Preaching-houses, is as much a Dissenter in law, and in fact, as any Preacher. Therefore those who plead for the administration of Baptism and the Lord's Supper by such among us, pretending that they are church people, because these men were episcopally ordained, may as well plead that the people of England are all Roman Catholics, because they were so four hundred years ago. Besides, if these Methodistical Clergymen are still really and properly Church Ministers, and that every thing they do is of the same nature and authority with what is done by the regular Clergy, and nothing more; where is the need of leaving the parish ministers? Why provoke them by a conduct so preposterous? Why lessen their revenue?

I should be sorry if any person supposed I intended to offend any of the clergy: There is nothing further from my thoughts. Those who are with us, I hope, make no pretensions to their being Churchmen as they have all joined in ordaining Presbyterian Ministers. Dr. Coke has ingenuously told the world *his sentiments* in his Sermon preached at the Ordination of the Rev. Francis Asbury, p. 6.

London

London Edition, 1785. He there avows his dissent, and calls the union betwixt the Church and the State *antichristian* !!! If any preference be given to these dissenting Clergy it will be impossible to make the world believe you are Church People, or satisfy the Preachers.

5. Let no more licences be taken out for either Preachers or Preaching-houses; but stand to the consequences, should you be brought before the Rulers for not taking them. Had this point been attended to from the beginning, we should have had our grievances redressed long since. Mr. Wesley advised the preachers not to take out licences. And several of us have followed his advice, and never have taken any. What kind of a being is a *licensed dissenting churchman*?

Suppose this plan could be consistently reduced to practice, we might then say with some propriety, that we wished to keep as near the church as we could. If it be not, it is not my fault.

III. Should both these schemes fail, or be rejected, I know but one way remaining, that will preserve us from confusion; namely, by attending to the following particulars.

1. By no means make a formal separation from the Church. We are not called to this at present. It would answer no good end to the connection, and would certainly drive away many very excellent people. Keep up as strongly as ever the preaching on Sunday Mornings at seven, and on Sunday Evenings after church time. Let every one that is so disposed, go to church; and let no one consider such a person as acting contrary to any rule of ours, because he or she does not choose to attend our service in church time. Upon this plan every individual may enjoy all the privileges of the Society, and yet go to church as often as there is service in it. This is all that any reasonable christian can desire.

2. Let all who choose to attend our service in church-hours have the same liberty. Going to church was never a condition of being in our society. Those therefore who attempt to make it such, are endeavouring to subvert the *Old Plan*. But it is objected, "If service be allowed in our chapels in church-hours, the people will not be satisfied unless they have the Sacrament also." This is most undoubtedly true. And would it not grieve you if the people were satisfied without it? Could you think much of the religion of a people that pretended great love to the blessed Jesus who shed his precious blood to redeem their souls, if they neglected the "dear memorials of his dying love?" Is it not enough to make us ashamed to look God in the face, when we reflect upon the nature and importance of the Lord's Supper, and consider how it is treated by many of the Methodists! Some are careless about it; others, in a trifling spirit, say they receive it as the Quakers do! On the other hand, hundreds in Bristol, Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool, and scores of places beside, who wish to receive it from the men of God who were the instruments of their salvation, are obliged

obliged to pine in secret for want of it. Shall careless triflers, who neglect this sacred ordinance, be countenanced on one hand, and serious people be slighted on the other? Beside, how many excellent people have been driven from us, for want of having an opportunity thus to "shew forth the Lord's death!" Do you say, "Let them go away!"—"Shame burn your cheek!" may they not reply, Go you away? have they not an equal right to say so? Try whether they cannot do without you. "But it will make us Dissenters, and be contrary to the *Old Plan* which the Preachers agreed to follow." The first part of this objection is answered. It will no more make you Dissenters than meeting a class or a band at three o'clock on Sunday-afternoon will, nor so much. Let him that can, confute me, and I will yield. It is *public worship*, not the sacrament exclusively, that the laws take knowledge of. Though you receive it every week in your own chapels, you need not be Dissenters unless you choose. The latter part of the objection is equally groundless. The old Plan which the Preachers agreed to follow has no allusion that I know of to the Sacraments. Our words are, Min. p. 25. "We engage to follow strictly the plan which Mr. Wesley left us at his death." The Sacraments were administered by several of the ordained Preachers before Mr. Wesley's death. That of Baptism in various places, without any ordination at all. Mr. Wesley knew this; and they knew him not, or they belie their consciences, who say, he could not help it. Nay, Mr. Wesley himself took Mr. Myles, who never was ordained, within the rails at Dublin, to assist him in giving the Lord's Supper! Mr. Wesley *designed* the Lord's Supper to be administered by the ordained Preachers, or why did he at their ordination, ask them, "Will you then give your faithful diligence, always so to minister the doctrine and SACRAMENTS—as the Lord hath commanded?" And why else did he deliver the Bible into their hands, saying these words, "Take thou authority to preach the Word of God, and to administer the holy SACRAMENTS in the congregation?" You may say, "This was for Scotland or America," I say, It was no such thing. The Reverend Messrs. Mather, Moore, &c. were not ordained for either Scotland or America, any more than I was. Therefore, the people who desire it, having the Lord's Supper from the Preachers whom the Conference may authorise to administer it, is no breach of the plan left by Mr. Wesley, nor the smallest infringement on the engagement of the Conference. Common sense will convince any man, that the Conference would never make an engagement so unscriptural in its nature, and injurious in its consequences, as that of shutting out the Sacrament would be. Nay, it would be breaking the plan which Mr. Wesley left at his death, if they had so engaged. The plan which the Conference will strictly follow is, that "No Preacher shall be stationed for any circuit above two years successively, unless God has been pleased

pleased to use him as an instrument of a remarkable revival." What has this to do with a preacher's giving the Sacrament, by the appointment, or permission of the Conference, to those people in his circuit WHO DESIRE IT? If you would hinder this by *compulsion*, because you do not approve of it, would you not *fine, imprison, banish, torture, or burn* your Brother in Christ, sooner than he should enjoy his CHRISTIAN LIBERTY? You may say No: but God knows, I would not trust you out of my power. The conference engaged further, to maintain the Methodist plan of Classes, Bands, Love-feasts, Watch-nights, and Quarterly-meetings, as Mr. Wesley left them.

Will the granting all that is wished for, interfere with this engagement? You know it will not. "But this plan will increase the Preachers' influence too much." This objection I do not understand. For my own part, I live sincerely beloved by many thousands of good people, who have profited by my ministry. This is all the influence I want, and I think my brethren are herein like-minded. What can any Preacher gain by his influence, except an opportunity of being more useful? You surely do not envy him this! To conclude for the present, (prepared for a reply) I give it as my opinion, that while all the Methodists who choose it, go to church; and all who do not, have full liberty to receive the ordinances from their own Preachers, under the direction and control of the Conference, the connection will stand, as a part of the Church of Christ, on the rock of ages, *and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*. But if a spirit of intolerance should prevail, a division will be unavoidable; and those Bigots who cause it, must answer to God for the consequences. May God lead us all aright, for Christ's sake. Amen.

An Appendix.

SINCE I published the first edition of this pamphlet, (about eight months ago) I have had frequent opportunities of hearing the general opinion concerning it. And it gives me pleasure to find, that a great majority, of those whose judgment I think of any consequence, upon the whole, approve of it. The first edition is entirely disposed of, and several hundreds of this are bespoke. This encourages me to hope that my design in publishing it, as expressed in the Title-Page, will in a good degree be answered.

A few

A few persons have expressed great surprise, that I make it a matter of such indifference, whether people belong to the church, or are Dissenters. To these I can only say, It is a matter of perfect indifference to me. I have no objection to the national form of worship; but I think every person has an unalienable right from God, to choose what form he pleases; and I would rather there should be no form, than countenance any species of persecution: And every thing is persecution, that is designed to force men to conform to any mode of religion, or religious opinions.

Some have thought it would be better to have said nothing about the Clergy, especially the Bishops, as they are quiet at present. To these gentle Spirits I wish peace! But I think, on a more strict perusal of the pamphlet, they will be convinced, that I have paid the Bishops and Clergy the greatest respect, by the plan I have proposed of uniting with them. Indeed I have been blamed on the other hand, for proposing any such offers to be made to the Bishops, or for wishing to have any thing to do with them. But as my main design in publishing, was to prevent a division among our own people, I still think what I have written may stand as it does. If the Methodists disapprove of it, or the Ecclesiastical powers reject it, I am not without hopes that it will convince many, of the propriety of uniting to seek relief from the *Civil Power*. We are more oppressed than any people in the Land, by Laws which were never intended for the ends to which they are applied. And that at a time when there are not more loyal subjects than we are, in the Kingdom, nor a people more firmly attached to the British Constitution. I do not believe there is a Minister in England, who prays more sincerely, and constantly for King George and his Family than I do; and, notwithstanding some malevolent inuendoes thrown out by some disaffected Persons in London, in their "THREE LETTERS," I believe all the Preachers are herein like minded. Witness our last Minutes. If we must still groan beneath our burthen, let us at least cleave together in love, and allow each other free liberty to use the ordinances of Christ, agreeable to the sacred dictates of Conscience and the word of God.

BRISTOL, March 22, 1793.



Finis.